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# ARGUS







# ARGUS

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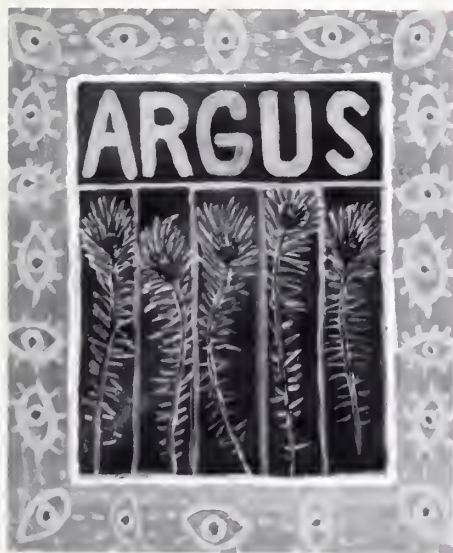
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Special thanks to Dr. E. Robert Black, Mrs. Ann Black, and Susan Norman

THERESA MILLIGAN

## Past Imperfect

Echoed softly in my mind  
Thoughts drift slowly back in time.  
Words once spoken, smoked and hazed  
And, I think, "the better days."  
Though I see my days as flow'rd;  
Soft my words, and spoken cow'rd.  
Actions down with thoughts most pure  
Hide the spirit's hot demure.  
Candied glimpses seem so sweet,  
What seemed like sugar tastes of wheat.  
Beauty's sweet, so is the flow'r  
But petals to the palate dour.  
Tender thoughts soon go sour  
When left idle for ere an hour.



BABATUNDE OBAYAN

## Down . . . Not Out

Stranded in a jet-set age  
slave to consistent, pounding, brooding.  
The whole world races by  
with one eye closed  
and the other squinted.  
Time crawls by like a leper.  
Decisions hampered,  
patience tapers,  
suspense teases  
like a stripper.  
Faith is the sword  
that kills the doubts.  
The blood is wiped  
with the cloth  
of perseverance.

EDDIE THOMPSON

## Blink

They command me not to step out of line  
But will not tell me where the line leads  
Just follow the yellow-brick road  
It's always been done that way  
Greater than I have failed  
Why buck the system  
Don't make waves  
Conform  
Blink  
No way  
I just can't  
Who are these clowns  
Feeding me their lies  
Their methods are all wrong  
The line is leading nowhere  
So I'll make my own paths now  
Simon will not say what I can do  
Someone has to tell the king he's naked

# NIGHT CLASS

Sally Richards-Bryant



RICK OLIVIER

past midnight  
two to three hour  
reading Hemingway  
keeping company with  
Chameleon friend  
gazing over my shoulder  
from curtain rod prop  
above the bed  
    sad exiled creature  
    from outside's  
    sweet olives and cottonwoods  
he knows what small child's games  
I still cling to

sees me watching  
the moon also rising  
    blue white  
    full communion wafer  
    luminous above us  
cat obviously curls  
upon covers at footboard's edge  
sleeps off excessive catness  
lizard and I share secrets  
    night-time thoughts  
    sheets cold against my toes  
    iron-lungishly heavy quilts  
    the sweetness of your sleepy breath



STEPHANIE RYALS JIMERSON

## Generations

Walking under the echo of a song,  
The wind spins his web —  
    luring leaves.  
His sacrifice stands calm,  
    calling  
I swing under her,  
    over her —  
Up into the kindles of mortality,  
    spirit.  
There the light of my own existence glows —  
    Burning through me,  
    Coming to me.  
Then back into her shadows I fall.

## A Death or Two

Upon the water lies a death or two —  
    They say he circled around and back,  
    As she fought and spat,  
    Swearing he would never take her.  
But as those fearless wings stretched out,  
An aura of blackness surrounded them.  
    Deeper,  
        and deeper.  
    Ringing,  
        and wringing.  
Until finally she came above to float.  
    Cradling their own images,  
    Together as one.

"THE OLD WOMAN AND THE YOUNG BOY WERE TOO FAR AWAY FROM EACH OTHER TO HAVE SPOKEN WORDS, BUT THERE SEEMED TO BE AN UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN THEM."

# MORDINA

BY RANDALL PLEASANT

Everything felt different to the old woman as she walked out the back door of her house. The hot Louisiana sun did not make her feel strong today. She felt like a stranger to it as it burned her skin. A feeling came over her that she had not felt in many years; a feeling of change. She walked over to her well and poured some water for her goat, then poured some over the head of her old hound dog who was sleeping beside the well. "Go get my grandson," she said, "I must go see someone today." The hound dog shook off some of the water, then took off down the road. Not even a lazy old hound dog would refuse to obey Ropetha, the last mal-ojo among her people.

Slowly she walked around to the front of her house and sat in a chair under an oak tree. "Hurry, you old mutt," she said as she watched her dog disappear down the road. While she waited for her grandson to come pick her up, she began to think about the past and about how lonely she was. Even her grandson did not like to come around her. He, as well as the other young men, often called her a witch. "How little they understand the old ways," she thought to herself.

Half an hour later her grandson drove up. Walking out from under the oak tree to greet her grandson, she turned and faced the sun once again, but it still burned her skin and made her feel weak. "Hurry up you old hag," her grandson thought to himself as he waited for Ropetha to get into the car. After she got in the car, she looked over at her grandson and said, "Old hag like me not knows nothing about fixing a car, but old hag can make lots of things go wrong with it. Her grandson didn't say anything back; he understood her meaning.

Later that day a young boy was laughing and playing with some other kids under an old cedar tree when a strange feeling came over him. With a look of amazement on his face he stood up, looked to the east and walked a few steps past



JOSEPH MORAN

more than she could conceive.

Walking with careful steps, she stopped at the front porch of the house, looked to the north into the distant face of the young boy. The old woman and the young boy were too far away from each other to have heard any spoken words, but there seemed to have been an understanding between them. The old woman closed her eyes a moment to think, then walked into the house where both of the boy's grandparents hugged her neck and showed her much respect.

The young boy walked over to where his mother and father were working on a tractor and stood beside his mother. Without looking at the boy his mother asked, "What is it you want now, Paul?"

"Can I go over to Grandpa's?" asked Paul.

"Don't think so," his mother said, "Supper's on the stove now."

His father stopped working and pointed at the other kids and said, "Let him go or we'll have to feed the rest of that gang."

Paul started walking toward his grandfather's house and said, "I won't stay long."

His mother watched him walk away, then called to him, "You act right, you hear, and don't eat anything. I'll be done cooking soon."

It was only a few hundred yards to his grandfather's house, but it seemed to take a long time for him to get there. Walking down the lane he felt afraid because he did not understand what was happening, but as he was walking up the steps of the house he suddenly felt very important and very sure of himself.

At first his grandparents could not understand why the old woman, a person of great respect, would go and hug the boy's neck instead of waiting for him to come and hug her. When they realized what had taken place they too came and hugged the child. Both of the old women sang as the young boy sat in a chair between them. Paul could not understand the song, which was made up of Spanish and Indian words, but he

his friends. He, too, realized that something was about to change. The hot noon sun no longer burned his back, but made him feel strong.

A warm wind blew through his hair and against his face as the strange feeling came over him again. He turned and looked to the south as if to answer a call. In the distance he could see his grandparents on the porch of their house waiting for visiting kinfolks to come inside.

Ropetha got out of the car and balanced herself on her cane. As she looked out across the open fields towards the pine woods, she let her mind go back to the past. She turned at the sound of a cowbell. The sound, which came from the near-by hardwood bottom, almost made her cry as she dreamed of her youth. The beauty of the land seemed to overwhelm her as the past ran through her mind. Over the past ninety-four years, the land and the people had changed



knew they were singing about him. Just why they were singing he did not know.

The boy's grandfather stood at the back door listening to the singing. None of this seemed right to him. It was hard to understand why his sister, Ropetha, was doing this. Times had changed. There no longer was any reason for mal-ojo or mordinas among their people. The question of what would become of his grandson kept running through his mind as he slowly walked through the woods back of his house.

The years passed without much to remind the boy of what had really happened five years ago. At fifteen, he still did not know the things the old woman had wanted to teach him, for a stroke and other illnesses had kept her in bed most of the past four years. She often worried about what she had done and what she had not been able to do.

A few days before she died, Ropetha was able to visit the young boy and his grandmother, who was now a widow. After the hugs of respect, the teenage boy wasted no time getting back to the friends he had been playing with. For a long time neither of the women said a word. Then Ropetha began to cry softly.

Lena, the boy's grandmother, asked, "What will happen to my grandson?" Ropetha looked up and said, "I don't know what will happen. There is so much he needs to know, and I don't think I will be able to finish teaching him, for I feel like I won't live to see much of this moon or the next. Maybe he will just forget what has happened and it will pass. I think my brother was right about there not being a need anymore for someone like me among our people."

"Everything has changed," said Lena, "Our young people know nothing of the old ways."

After a few moments of silence Lena said, "The young people move off and become like strangers to their own families. When we pass away, will our children no longer be a people anymore?"

"They will have to do what is best for them," replied Ropetha. Taking slow steps she walked to the front door and said, "We can only pray they'll do right things when need be." Looking out the screen door she tried to remember what her younger days were like. Her memory seemed blurred by her age.

Walking out on the porch, Ropetha said, "I go now, but if you will, pray for me. I have many things our Lord will hold against me. I don't think I will see you again, my friend. You have been good peoples to me. It is good to have been of our people."

Lena, who had walked out on the porch with Ropetha, said, "You have been good peoples to us, too. We will miss you very much my friend." After hugging each other, Lena wiped away a few tears from Ropetha's face and said, "I will pray for you as you ask. I know you were a good woman, my friend."

As they were leaving, Ropetha made her grandson stop the car. For a few minutes she watched the young boy who was playing with some other kids at the edge of the woods. Paul stopped playing, stood up, and waved to the old woman. She waved back, then told her grandson to drive on. Again she began to cry softly.

Paul watched the car drive off, then started to sing a song made up of Spanish and Indian words. He still did not know what the song said, but it felt right to sing it as he thought of the old woman. A deep feeling of loneliness came over him, for he knew the old woman would die

soon. She was a strange old lady, but he would miss her very much when she was gone.

A week later, on a cold wet day, Ropetha died; a few days short of her one-hundredth birthday. At her grave only the older folks and one teenage boy gave her the respect that a lady like her should have gotten from her people. Even in death most of the people were still afraid of her. All of them had heard tales of the things she had done to people in the past. These tales were memories for some, for they had crossed her anger at different times in the past.

As it began to rain again, the younger men and women started to leave the graveyard. Among them a few jokes about the old woman could be heard. Even one of her own great-grandsons said out loud, "That old witch is probably already in hell for all the things she done. Dying was the best thing she ever did in her life."

Standing off a short distance from the grave, Paul kept thinking about all the things the old woman had told him. There was so much he did not understand, and there seemed to be no answers for him. As he was leaving the graveyard, three of the younger kids came up to him and hugged his neck; he suddenly felt very important and very sure of himself.

An old man leaning on a cane had watched what had happened. "Nothing ever changes," he thought to himself. The old man was not the only one that had seen what had happened. Looking around the graveyard, the old man noticed all the other old folks smiling at each other. The old man, along with the other old folks made their way over to Paul, hugged his neck, and showed him much respect. Through the cold misting rain a soft song of Spanish floated through the pine trees.

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## RANDALL PLEASANT

### The Knife

The knife was a thing that never died,  
But the life of its soul was just a lie.  
The point and the edge, the passion of the blade,  
Darksome netherworld fury, iron-bound made.

Splendid demons, slaves who played in my room,  
Listening to unnatural words spoken in silence gloom.  
Rage burned in their blood-shot eyes,  
For out of the blade they did arise.

Mysterious strange things in darken caves,  
Fiends who served me, my shackled slaves.  
Mocking laughter out of a hellish mist,  
Black blade full of things that hiss.

Visions of an endless quest,  
Led to where a thirty year dream rest.  
High adventure in our exotic lands,  
Wretchedly foul the blood on my hands.

I was waiting for them, my days were like night,  
The two young women helped me see the light.  
I repented my sins and prayed in hope,  
Now the knife is up north, cutting Mennonite soap.

JACK B. BEDELL

## Haruspex

Visions upon visions crowd the view,  
Destinies unfold before their time  
All within the mind of a simple man  
Housed delicately amongst emperors.

Possessed of a gift beyond order,  
His life is to please with glimpses of fate.  
For kings play he consul,  
Though jesters do the same.

Time after time, he loses sight of the Way  
The world around him spins -  
Present meaning nothing, visions from yesterday,  
Tomorrows without hope confuse reality.

Cast into the games of kings,  
He sees without looking.  
Fates from all angles blind him,  
But he cannot shut his eyes.

Turning from the prodigal Son, he sees the moon -  
A winding world where too many expect  
Answers from the play he envisions  
As if he were the playwright and not the player.

Saturated with scenes, he feels their pain  
Linked much too closely with his own.  
Looking into lives he would fain forget,  
Prayers unanswered, he collects his Senses.

## Prometheus

Speculative glances unending  
Rising into a starry sky,  
Thought after thought provokes  
Feelings of immersion within —  
The time held to lament.

Passing in moments flashed,  
Helpless grasps pretend  
To reach for answers  
In a sea's utter confusion —  
But in vain, feign such truth.

Hands tied of conviction  
Fail to sever the restraint  
Of Pride's silky webbing  
Binding wrist to wrist —  
A constraintive pulse.

Amorous opportunity not emotive stress  
Binds one's reaction to life;  
Love, to an honest man,  
Sprouts chains of freedom —  
Unalterably an alter predicament.



## Remembrance

Looking into an empty glass  
It becomes easy to remember  
Times in retrospect  
So clear and yet so painful.

Decisions made too quickly  
Choices clouded, unfounded  
Seem all too lethargic  
In regret's blinding light.  
Roads closed behind you,  
There's no way back.

To that one moment's smile  
You return again in mind only —  
Hold on to your memories, they say.  
They're all you own inevitably.

Were it not for that smile  
Held within the mind's eye,  
The feelings lost would fade  
And with them take remorse.  
But locked into a direction,  
You carry all inside you.

Forever wishing to fill  
Your life like so many glasses  
Holding only the emptiness of fear,  
You simply look in —  
Remembrance.

## Manstate

Golden-haired wonders,  
Harlots and the like,  
All forms and formed of Beauty,  
Dance on the edge of Man's dreams.

Singing so softly  
Just to sweep us away,  
Or so it seems —  
Beauty, the shiny weapon,  
Plays on our senses.

Taken beyond aback,  
We can only stutter  
Beguiled by that we cannot own —  
A blow to our superiority!

Life, in infinite grace,  
Has given us these pearls  
To worship and war over.  
Confused, our duty fulfilled —  
Bowing to a Rib on a pedestal.

JANIS McDERMOTT

## For Eyes to Notice

long for eyes to notice  
    burn within a smile  
    blaze and season down  
how much hinting in the dark  
    to spark across distance  
    a twinkle of acknowledgement  
  
worthiness rare of this one,  
    expanding such desire  
    to circulate blood younger living  
twinkles, provide the sole spark,  
    imagination pump  
    many of the mind



## Criticism

Art questions my loyalty  
    friend to all  
though it never rejected an interlude  
    only within  
deeper than the curls and curves  
    of fiction  
opinion has failed poetry  
  
My refusal to achieve the expected  
    is not denial, but admission  
If poetry flourish no longer  
    not for loyalty can guilt reprove

## Confusion

dreams of wishes  
wishes of dreams  
    reality  
    gets caught  
somewhere between

ERICA TIFFANY LONDON

## Nocturnia

Silence.  
Nothing interferes  
With me, or  
Whatever I am doing.  
A warm night breeze  
Blows through  
My open window.  
My mind works best  
Late at night.  
Wee hours of the morning,  
Old cassettes are playing low,  
Playing the old music  
From a couple of years past.  
I put my pen to paper,  
Or my brush to canvas.  
The hassles of the day are forgotten.  
I live my life at night,  
A rebel of the diurnal world.  
The darkness shelters, and  
Nourishes me, my mind, my spirit.  
The dawn comes.  
I sleep.

# SUPERMARKET IN LOUISIANA: PRESSED HAM

Leslie A. Gregory



ROBERT TOOKE

Práy•usd•dái•yham  
Práy•usd•dái•yham  
Práy•usd•dái•yham

Práy•usd•dái•yham

Práy•usd•dái•yham

Práy•usd•dái•yham  
Práy•usd•dái•yham  
Práy•usd•dái•yham

Práy•usd•dái•yham  
Práy•usd•dái•yham

the tiny cricket songs that chirp  
from two babes parked in the luncheon meats

in chorus they chant  
to what god I cannot decide  
certainly one on whom they can rely  
with whom they are well please

two blond insect children,  
cicadae tucked safely in a market cart,  
giggle a bit, continue still their ritual  
a red-neck infant cry  
in praise of poly-sealed pork

their coldcut mama — Mrs. Meatamorphosis  
hushes their salted songs:  
a ceremonial smack of a packaged,  
processed offering.  
Slap! into the depths of  
the cricket children's charriot

the nymph choir now cheers as  
they crawl towards the next aisle.

Práy•usd•dái•yham  
Práy•usd•dái•yham  
Práy•usd•dái•yham

Práy•usd•dái•yham

Práy•usd•dái•yham

Práy•usd•dái•yham  
Práy•usd•dái•yham  
Práy•usd•dái•yham

Práy•usd•dái•yham  
Práy•usd•dái•yham



## Tuesday Midmorning After a Going Away Party

Too much celebration  
for too many goodbyes.  
Outside a storm pours.  
As I stand alone at the sink,  
my hands soak in hot running water  
the rest of my body pickled  
in essence of cigarettes  
and just-empty beer cans —  
    ripe fruits from the yeasty night before,  
I wash the last glass  
fingers rub an obnoxious hum  
along the rim. My teeth clinch.  
Setting free the strainer  
I watch last night's memorabilia  
catch in the basket —  
    soggy corn chips and ashes.  
In the next room,  
my friend opts for TV.  
I close my eyes.  
I'd rather hear the rain.

## For Susan's Texas Nights Away from Home

*"Louisiana is a dream state, a state of mind . . . a state to carry dreams from that you will never forget"*  
Louisiana Department of Tourism Postcard

A jazz infested, frosted night in  
La Louisiane.  
Trying to sleep,  
I write you postcards  
rattled electric blanketed thoughts,  
Mister Sandman cliches —  
    the blessings of colder weather,  
    homemade quilts  
FM waves goodnight  
saxophoned kisses from home  
roam boundless space  
perhaps to pounce  
upon your pillow  
say that you are loved,  
make moss-covered dreams:  
    hot strong chickory  
    sweet blues dances  
    cotton seed factory air  
    fragrant-warm  
fill foreign darkness  
other poets' shadows,  
different scholars' nighttimes,  
seemingly loveless voids

"IT'S LIKE MANY THINGS WE EXPERIENCE IN OUR EVERYDAY LIVES . . . WE UNDERSTAND SUCH PHENOMENA . . . AND DON'T UNDERSTAND THEM."

# UNDERSTANDING & UNDERSTANDING

BY NORMAN GERMAN



Twenty years ago at a dusty junior college in Oklahoma, Dr. Yostel taught me Composition 101 with rigor and skill and humor. A strong man with rugged face and gray hair thick as steel wool, he could play straight while delivering lines so absurd that, once the pinched little Shakespearean who had taught there for a hundred years rapped in the door window hard enough to break one of her chalk-brittle fingers.

Toward the end of the semester, Dr. Yostel was going over an essay on the Drought and the Great Depression. Reading to us, "You understood and you did not understand," he stopped to pace and extrapolate.

"The writer uses a rhetorical device called paradox, a statement that on its surface is contradictory but which, on closer inspection, yields a truth expressible in no conventional way. The generalization encapsulates the resignation of a people relentlessly assailed by natural and economic catastrophes beyond their control. It's like many things we experience in our everyday lives. Hurricanes in the South. Tornadoes in the Midwest. Blizzards in the North. We understand such phenomena . . . and don't

understand them."

He was rational, composed, matter-of-fact — was consciously demonstrating, through a premeditated off-handedness, the principles of effective writing that we stubbornly refused to employ.

"We know that tornadoes come every year. We see they were here last year. We know they'll return next year. They're regular and irregular, as predictable and unpredictable, as hemorrhoids."

Walking deadpan through a hail of laughter, he continued without a pause, "We understand the meteorological conditions conducive to hurricanes. Someday — perhaps — we'll be able to control, or at least manipulate, those conditions. Nevertheless, we will never understand why they visit us, why such cataclysms are intrinsic to our world."

Suddenly, he had the surprised look of a man who has been stabbed, hard. We watched as he put his muscular hands over his face. We listened as wave after wave of sobs filled the room.

ELLEN DOLLAR

## Remembering Glass Doorknobs

the blues  
are as  
heavy in  
the air  
as the  
steam  
from the  
wet concrete . . .  
sweat slowly  
finds its  
way from  
forehead to  
ground in  
drops that  
fall like  
brown, sad  
leaves



## Who Is She?

She lies  
to the  
world  
about  
herself -  
she lies  
to herself  
about  
the world -  
She sits  
alone  
at night  
and cries

ELIZABETH L. MURRAY

## Poem for My Case of You

- I. At midnight dark lace etched shadows  
play round these walls:  
moonshadows  
tree shadows  
gentle cricket love shadows  
us shadows  
fill the cloud-spun evening,  
close the void in darkened night.  
rain covers us both  
moon man gently rocks  
upon the cloudy ocean sky,  
too soon crickets turn to  
birds of morning and  
light shall flood such peace.
- II. Wind chimes blow in the face  
of westwinds hard.  
Beneath one-thousand quilts  
alone — shall I wonder  
where you are,  
I chose instead to ponder the moon.
- III. Rain and rails echo  
through early morning,  
prepare us for bed,  
nighttime's cradle rocked by  
wind-whistled lullabies.  
The moon spins fairy tales  
over our hoary jet-black towns.  
Miles apart we lie,  
open-eyed staring  
at darkness' noises  
across bleak distances  
sharing a single thought,  
a single dream.

# CONTRIBUTORS

An English major and a Philosophy minor from Abyssinia, Pennsylvania, **JACK BEDELL** is a disciple of Kant. He is a proponent of euthanasia and the AOD (not to be confused with birth control.)

A Wildlife Management major, **ELLEN DOLLAR** has dreams of calling The Guinness Book of World Records to time her lying on the beach in Greece. Until then, she's just hanging out, trying to find answers and question them.

Presently trying to impress the young and semi-learned at Northwestern, **NORMAN GERMAN** is a devoted English professor. In his spare time, Norman enjoys attending high teas and thrilling fellow guests with his knowledge of the mating habits of rabid animals.

Enjoying water polo, sushi bars, and raising ferrets avocationally, **LESLIE A. GREGORY** shares her house with her cat, Bryan, who currently thinks he's Jesus (before that he thought he was Kant and still has a small NSU following.)

**GYNGER L. INGRAM**, a freshman English major and a member of the NSU Honors Program, has been writing since she was eight-years-old. Her pen name is Erica Tiffany London and she has been previously published nationally. When not writing, she cuddles her three cats and draws unicorns.

A Technical Theatre major from Princeton, New Jersey, **STEPHANIE RYALS JIMERSON** enjoys having babies on top of mountains while holding on to her husband's knees — it hurts! But, hey, she believes she was put here for purely biological reasons — no questions asked.

**JANIS McDERMOTT**, a junior majoring in Interior Design, has a certain affinity for round orange things filled with air. She contributed several poems to this issue of *Argus* and her selection, "For Eyes to Notice," placed third in fall competition.

This is **THERESA MILLIGAN**'s first time to contribute to *Argus*. Her poem, "Past Imperfect" won an honorable mention in the fall 1985 contest.

**ELIZABETH L. MURRAY**, an Art major, is bored in Natchitoches with no phone, no hot water, and no soup mixes. At one point, she considered marriage, but has since then decided she would rather become an antarctic explorer and live among the penguins.

Preferring to be called Travis by his friends, **BABATUNDE OBAYAN** is actually planning to participate in that grand escape act called "graduation" this semester. His poem, "Down . . . Not Out" won an honorable mention in the fall 1985 contest.

**RANDALL PLEASANT**, a Computer Science major with a minor in Anthropology, hails from Spanish Lake, Louisiana. He is a twenty-eight-year-old freshman and his short story, "Mordina" placed first in the fall 1985 competition.

A Pre-Law student, **SALLY RICHARDS-BRYANT** considers herself a fan of Michelangelo, talking of him constantly as she comes and goes. Her favorite times are nights that lay like patients etherised upon tables.

A senior English Education major, **EDDIE P. THOMPSON** is a devout Christian from Jena, Louisiana. He enjoys sports "because you can tell more about the character of a man when he's stepping up to the plate or driving for a basket than you can at any coat and tie affair."



















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